

BOOK REVIEW

SARA E. JENSEN AND GUY R. MCPHERSON. 2008. **Living with Fire: Fire Ecology and Policy for the Twenty-first Century.** (ISBN-10 0520255895; ISBN-13 978-0520255890, hbk.). University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.ucpress.edu, orders@cpfsinc.com, The University of California Press, c/o California/Princeton Fulfillment Services, 1445 Lower Ferry Road, Ewing, New Jersey 08618, U.S.A., Fax: 1-800-999-1958, Overseas Fax: 1-609-883-7413, Phone: 1-800-777-4726). \$29.95, 192 pp., 8.3" × 5.5".

The authors look at how the ancient regime of wildfire in North America has played a role in shaping both nature and human habitat. McPherson and Jensen detail how fire has shaped North American ecosystems, but also how it threatens human lives and property. They explore the dilemma of fire through fire policy, fire science and fire management and suggest ways to address these issues.

The first chapter is entitled "Wildland fire in the West: the Big Picture" and explores how many Native American cultures were frequent burners, including early white settlers. The use of fire was abandoned in favor of aggressive fire suppression after the great fires in Idaho in 1910, and the recent Yellowstone fires only reinforced this concept amongst Washington policy-makers. "Fanning the Flames: Human Influences on Fire Regimes" looks at how changing and expanding human activities are shaping the way fires begin and develop once started. Fuel buildup often plays a minor role in the spread of economically destructive fires compared with the roles of weather and poorly devised developments in the wildland-urban interface. "The Failed State of Fire Suppression" explores the national policies that have failed to recognize that fire is necessary for the maintenance of many ecosystems and that fires cannot always be extinguished or prevented. "Logging the Forests to Save Them" shows how the Healthy Forests Initiative policies and practices have produced negative ecological and political effects instead of the intended result. It has promoted overly general management of very complex and unpredictable ecosystems, encouraged continued development in fire-prone areas, and undermined citizen participation in democratic decision-making. Public lands management should give up the idea of creating fireproof forests and focus instead on conserving wildland ecosystems. "Tools for Living with Fire" provides evidence for the proposition espoused in the previous chapter and for the idea that fire itself is the most efficient and effective tool for managing most fire-prone ecosystems. Fire management is strongly influenced by fuel management, but both are also affected by ignition sources, land use, species composition, and weather and climate patterns. The last chapter, "Policy Solutions" states that a national-level fire policy should be the first step in reworking fire-management practices. This should be followed by bringing budget allocation and staffing in line with the stated policy priorities. Lastly, the national fire policy must have a clear and effective mechanism for placing local fire-management decisions in the hands of local managers and citizens.

The book is geared primarily to help scientists, policy makers and the general public, especially residents of fire-prone areas, to understand the history of fire and how to cope with it. The authors offer abundant historical and analytic information to shed new light on current controversies. *Living with Fire* also presents ways for dealing with fire that recognizes its role in the environment, and how to rebuild important ecological and political processes to manage fire and other complex policy dilemmas.

Highly recommended for large public libraries, smaller libraries with an interest in fire management, colleges and universities with programs in forest ecology or fire management, and all others with an interest in forest ecology or fire management.

From the publisher—"Sara E. Jensen is Private Lands Conservation Associate with Defenders of Wildlife. Guy R. McPherson, Professor of Natural Resources and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona, is author of *Applied Ecology and Natural Resource Management* among other books."—Gary L. Jennings, *Botanical Research Institute of Texas*, 500 East 4th Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4025, U.S.A.